Research Notes: John Arthur Laughlin

Research Overview:

The documentary record for John Arthur Laughlin is very complete for a nineteenth-century Midwestern life. He can be followed from birth in Iowa through adulthood, marriage, parenthood, steady employment, and death, with regular appearances in census records and other civil documentation. Taken on its own, the record presents a coherent and largely orderly life: raised and living primarily in Iowa, married to Rosanna Devine, father to a large family whose children largely survived to adulthood, and consistently employed as a railroad master responsible for maintaining track and infrastructure.

What the record does not show is how life inside that household unfolded. No direct personal recollections of John Arthur Laughlin survive. Family memory reaches him only indirectly and unevenly, through later recollections about some of his children. These remembered details are included here not to explain him or to draw conclusions, but because they mark places where the documentary trail thins and other kinds of records may exist.

The brief entries about his children are family recollections. Each one preserves a clue, an irregularity, or a point of strain that may be worth following in future research. They are not presented as a narrative and are not meant to resolve the question of who John Arthur Laughlin was. Instead, they map areas where further work is possible.

Speculative Narrative:

a future optional section.

Time Line:

May 1850 - Birth at Delhi, Delaware, Iowa.[1]

[1] Baptismal record

1850 - US Census at Delaware, Iowa.[2]

Arthur Langhlin, 45
Jason Danghlin, 40
James Langhlin, 4
Ann Langhlin, 7
Wm Langhlin, 4

1854 - Birth of brother Henry Laughlin (1854 -) South Fork, Delaware, Iowa.[3]

1860 - US Census at Hopkinton, Delaware, Iowa.[4]

Arthur Laughlin, 55
Susan Laughlin, 50
James Laughlin, 18
Ann Laughlin, 16
William Laughlin, 15
John Laughlin, 10
Henry Laughlin, 5

1870 - US Census at South Fork, Delaware, Iowa.[5]

Arthur Laughlin, 66
Susan Laughlin, 66
John Laughlin, 16
Henry Laughlin, 15
Henry Laughlin, 5
Ida Loomis, 16

[2] "United States Census, 1850", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MZ4D-46P: Fri Mar 08 07:02:14 UTC 2024), Entry for Arthur Laughlin and Susan Laughlin, 1850.

[3] Baptism of brother Henry Laughlin

[4] "United States Census, 1860", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M82J-1M1: Mon Jul 08 06:59:22 UTC 2024), Entry for Ann Miller and John Miller, 1860.

[5] "United States Census, 1870", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDJB-8KV: Tue Mar 05 07:15:59 UTC 2024), Entry for Arthur Laughlin and Susan Laughlin, 1870.

27 Feb 1874- Death of father Arthur Laughlin (1804 - 1874) at South Fork, Delaware, Iowa.[6]

6 Nov 1874 - Marriage to Rosanna Devine (1854 - 1931) at Delhi, Delaware, Iowa.[7]

1 Jun 1875 - Birth of son John Arthur Laughlin (1875 - 1923) South Fork, Delaware, Iowa.[8]

Family recollection — John Arthur Laughlin Jr. (born 1875) was the first son of John Arthur Laughlin and the direct ancestral line followed in these notes. To keep the two men distinct, he is referred to here as John Arthur Laughlin Jr.

Father: John Arthur Laughlin / son: John Arthur Laughlin Jr.
In 1884, while still a minor, John Arthur Laughlin Jr. inherited land in Fayetteville, Iowa , from an unidentified individual. A probate court dispute followed over who should serve as his legal guardian. The parties named were his father, John Arthur Laughlin, and a man identified as Edward Rice, whose relationship to the child is unknown.

This event is known only through an index card, and no underlying probate file has yet been examined. The circumstances of the inheritance and the reason a non-family member was named guardian remain unresolved.
As an adult, John Arthur Laughlin Jr. lived in Chicago. He died there on December 22, 1923, after being struck by an automobile. Whether a coroner's inquiry, court record, or newspaper account exists has not yet been determined.

16 Jan 1877 - Birth of daughter Anna Elizabeth Laughlin (1877 - 1956) at Manchester, Delaware, Iowa.[9]

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[6] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVK3-DNSZ: 4 October 2023), Arthur Laughlin, ; Burial, Delhi, Delaware, Iowa, United States of America, Saint Johns Cemetery; citing record ID 32327034, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[7] "Iowa, County Marriages, 1838-1934", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XJ8M-SYH: Tue Mar 19 12:31:20 UTC 2024), Entry for Jno. Laughlin and Rosa Devine, 06 Nov 1874.

[8] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVV3-XFPH : 24 May 2022), John Arthur Laughlin, ; Burial, Clinton, Clinton, Iowa, United States of America, Saint Mary's Cemetery; citing record ID 6338810, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[9] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVVR-BPFH: 24 February 2022), Anne Elizabeth Laughlin Barrett, ; Burial, Des Plaines, Cook, Illinois, United States of America, All Saints Catholic Cemetery and Mausoleum; citing record ID 27776360, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

Family recollection — Anna Elizabeth Laughlin was the daughter of John Arthur Laughlin and Rosanna Devine. She maintained a lifelong friendship with Gertrude Sheppard, the wife of her older brother, John Arthur Laughlin Jr., reflecting a relationship that continued beyond the marriage itself. Anna Elizabeth Laughlin had a large family of daughters, and her youngest child was a son.

1879 - Birth of daughter Rosella E Laughlin (1879 - 1918) at Delhi, Delaware, Iowa.[10]

Family recollection — Rosella E. Laughlin was a daughter of John Arthur Laughlin and Rosanna Devine. She died young in 1918, reportedly of heart cancer. The basis for this diagnosis is unknown, and no supporting medical or death records have yet been examined.

Janet Boddicker recalled her grandmother, Esther Laughlin Wheeler, describing her sister Rosella as "the heart of the family."

Following Rosella's death, her husband later died by suicide after being caught embezzling funds from a bank. After his death, their children were raised by members of his family, the Kelly family.

1880 - US Census at Hopkinton, Delaware, Iowa.
[11]

John Laughlin - white, male, age 30, born Iowa, parents born Ireland
Rosa Laughlin - white, male, age 25, born Iowa, parents born Ireland
John A Laughlin - white, male, age 4, born Iowa, parents born Ireland
Annie Laughlin - white, male, age 3, born Iowa, parents born Ireland
Rosa Laughlin - white, male, age 1, born Iowa, parents born Ireland

26 Jul 1882 - Birth of son William Laughlin (1882 - 1926) at Brush Creek, Fayette, Iowa.[12]

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[10] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVVV-3X5S: 13 April 2023), Dove, ; Burial, Adair, Adair, Iowa, United States of America, Saint John's Catholic Cemetery; citing record ID 23544441, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[11] "United States Census, 1880", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MD2H-994: Fri Mar 08 01:19:56 UTC 2024), Entry for John Laughlin and Rosa Laughlin, 1880.

[12] "Iowa, County Births, 1880-1935", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VJP2-VMY: Sat Aug 31 06:25:26 UTC 2024), Entry for Laughlan and John Laughlin, 26 Jul 1882.

Family recollection — William Laughlin was a son of John Arthur Laughlin and Rosanna Devine, and a twin of Harry Laughlin. As an adult, William married, but the marriage was brief and ended in divorce. Divorce was uncommon within the family's Irish Catholic background.

26 Jul 1882 - Birth of son Harry Laughlin (1882 - 1940) at Brush Creek, Fayette, Iowa.[13]

Family recollection — Harry Laughlin was a son of John Arthur Laughlin and Rosanna Devine, and a twin of William Laughlin. Like his brother, Harry married, but the marriage was brief and ended in divorce. He had a daughter who used the Laughlin surname.

In adulthood, Harry struggled with severe alcoholism and lived as a hobo. He died in Illinois. After his death, his sister Esther Laughlin Wheeler brought his body back to Iowa, where he was buried in an unmarked grave next to his parents.

22 Nov 1884 - Probate at Fayette County, Iowa.[14]

5 Dec 1885 - Birth of daughter Esther Susan Laughlin (1885 - 1957) at Arlington, Fayette, Iowa.[15]

Family recollection — Esther Laughlin was the daughter of John Arthur Laughlin and Rosanna Devine. She was appointed postmistress, a position she held through the Great Depression and beyond. Such appointments were typically political in nature.

In 1914, Esther traveled with her sisters by train to North Dakota when their father was suddenly taken ill, learning en route that he had already died.

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[13] "Iowa, County Births, 1880-1935", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VJP2-V9M: Sat Aug 31 06:25:50 UTC 2024), Entry for Laughlan and John Laughlin, 26 Jul 1882.

[14] Probate Packet

[15] "Texas Deaths, 1890-1976", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K338-6HS: Sat Jul 13 22:41:01 UTC 2024), Entry for Esther Susan Wheeler and John Laughlin, 6 Aug 1957.

Later, following the death of her brother Harry Laughlin in Illinois, Esther brought his body back to Iowa for burial.

1885 - Iowa State Census at Arlington Fayette, Iowa.[16]

Rosa Laughlin, 30
John A Laughlin, 9
Anne E Laughlin, 8
Rosella Laughlin, 6
William F. Laughlin, 2
James H. Laughlin, 2
John Laughlin, 30

26 Sep 1889 - Death of mother Susan McMeel (1801 - 1889) at Arlington, Fayette, Iowa.
[17]

27 Jun 1890 - Birth of daughter Mary Helen Laughlin (1890 - 1965) at Lyons, Marshalltown, Iowa.[18]

Dec 1894 - Birth of son Leo Laughlin (1894 - 1909) at Wausau, Marathon, Wisconsin.[19]

Family recollection - Leo Laughlin was the son of John Arthur Laughlin and Rosanna Devine. As a teenager, he was caught smoking and was punished by a beating administered by his father. Following this incident, Leo ran away from home.

After leaving Iowa, Leo jumped a train and died in Arkansas. The circumstances of his death are unknown. Upon being notified of his son's death, John Arthur Laughlin traveled by train to Arkansas and brought Leo's body back to Iowa.

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[16] "Iowa State Census, 1885", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:HZQD-1MM: Thu Sep 19 18:55:59 UTC 2024), Entry for John Laughlin and Rose A Laughlin, 1885.

[17] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVV8-ZL3F: 15 December 2020), Susan McMeel Laughlin, ; Burial, Sheldon, O'Brien, Iowa, United States of America, Saint Patricks Cemetery; citing record ID 10802503, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[18] "Texas Deaths, 1890-1976", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K78B-B3B: Wed Sep 18 13:21:29 UTC 2024), Entry for Mary Helen Wareham and William G Baker, 29 December 1965.

[19] Birth of son Leo Laughlin

Leo was buried alone in a cemetery in Iowa, at a location now precisely documented. He has no gravestone. Cemetery records indicate that burial plots were paid for by his parents, but no marker or ongoing grave upkeep was provided. This information was obtained directly from the cemetery office manager, who located the burial file.

22 Sep 1900 - Birth of daughter Marguerite Ethel Laughlin (1900 - 1972) at Wausau, Marathon, Wisconsin.[20]

Family recollection — Marguerite Laughlin was the daughter of John Arthur Laughlin and Rosanna Devine. When she was approximately five years old, Marguerite was sent away to live in a convent because she would not toilet-train. The length of time she remained there is unknown.

As recalled by her daughter, Marguerite was remembered as a beautiful woman. During the Depression, a photograph of her was used in advertising for permanent-wave hairstyles and appeared in beauty salons throughout Chicago.

As an adult, Marguerite worked steadily as a nurse during the Depression and earned a higher income than her husband.

1900 - US Census at Wausau, Marathon, Wisconsin.[21]

John Laughlin - head of household, white, male, born x, age 45, married x years, born Iowa, parents born Ireland
Rosa Laughlin - wife, white, female, born x, age 45, married x years, born New Jersey, parents born Ireland
Rose Laughlin - daughter, white, female, age 21, born New Jersey, parents born Ireland
Henry Laughlin - son, white, male, age 17, born Iowa, parents born Ireland
Willie Laughlin - son, white, male, age 17, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey
Esther Laughlin - daughter, white, female, age 14, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey
Mary Laughlin - daughter, white, female, age 10, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey

[20] Birth of daughter Marguerite Ethel Laughlin

[21] "United States Census, 1900", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MMVX-VL3: Thu Apr 11 20:48:21 UTC 2024), Entry for John Laughlin and Rose Laughlin, 1900.

Leo Laughlin - son, white, male, age 5, born Wisconsin, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey

1905 - Iowa State Census at Marshalltown, Marshall, Iowa. [22]

Jno. Laughlin
Rose Laughlin
Mary Laughlin
Leo Laughlin
Margarite Laughlin

Before 1907 - Death of brother Henry Laughlin (1854 - 1907), possibly in Nebraska. [23]

1907 - Death of sister Anna R Laughlin (1844 - 1907) at Sheldon, Obrien, Iowa. [24]

1908 - Death of brother James C Laughlin (1841 - 1908) at Pittsburg, Crawford, Kansas. [25]

16 Feb 1909 - Death of son Leo Laughlin at Roland, Pulaski, Arkansas. [26]

[22] 1905 - Iowa State Census

[23] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVK3-X96G: 29 May 2020), Leo Laughlin, 1909; Burial, , ; citing record ID , *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[24] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVK3-XTFS: 24 February 2022), Anna R. Laughlin Beacom, ; Burial, Sheldon, O'Brien, Iowa, United States of America, Saint Patricks Cemetery; citing record ID 35067271, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[25] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVKD-SQSH: 13 June 2023), James C. Laughlin, ; Burial, Liberty, Montgomery, Kansas, United States of America, Liberty Cemetery; citing record ID 41083516, *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

[26] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVK3-X96G: 29 May 2020), Leo Laughlin, 1909; Burial, , ; citing record ID , *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

1910 - US Census at Marshalltown, Marshall, Iowa.[27]

John Laughlin - head of household, male, white, age 55, married, born Iowa, parents born Ireland
Rose A Laughlin - wife, female, white, age 53, married, born New Jersey, parents born Ireland
William F Laughlin - son, male, white, age 26, single, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey
Mary A Laughlin - daughter, female, white, age 19, single, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey
Marguerite E Laughlin, 9 - daughter, female, white, age 9, single, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey

20 Apr 1914 - Death at Hillsboro, Traill, North Dakota.[28]

Apr - Burial at Oak Hill Cemetery at Belle Plaine, Benton, Iowa.[29]

Apr 1914 - Obituary

M & St.L RAILWAY OFFICIAL STRICKEN WITH PNEUMONIA WHILE IN NORTH DAKOTA ON BUSINESS. FUNERAL HERE ON THURSDAY MORNING

John Laughlin, for fifteen years road master for the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad with headquarters in Marshalltown, died suddenly at Hillsboro, North Dakota, on Sunday. Word of his death was received by his family here on Monday morning. At this time, two of his daughters, Miss Esther

[27] "United States Census, 1910", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MGHN-ZK3: Fri Mar 08 21:43:00 UTC 2024), Entry for John Laughlin and Gertrude Laughlin, 1910.

[28] Death record

[29] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVK3-8683 : 29 May 2020), John Arthur Laughlin, 1914; Burial, , ; citing record ID , *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

Laughlin and Mrs. A.J. (Helen) Wareham, were on their way to the bedside of their father. They had gotten as far as Webster City when they were informed of the death of their father and returned from this city.

Mr. Laughlin had spent the winter at his home here and two weeks ago left for Hillsboro to look at some land he was interested in. He was taken ill with pneumonia shortly after arriving in Hillsboro. His condition seemed to be favorable, and he was apparently improving when suddenly there was a relapse from which he failed to rally. The body was brought back to this city on Tuesday night.

The funeral was held on Thursday morning at the Catholic Church and was in charge of the Rev. Henry Myers. Interment was in Oak Hill Cemetery.

Thursday April? 1914